

Re: HB 252

Mr. Chairman Ron Stalker and members of the committee, I am Kryssa Bowman. I would like to address the issues surrounding "gender identity or expression, and sexual orientation under the laws prohibiting discrimination" as included in HB 252. I am here on behalf of my gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered friends and family who, at one point or another have experienced discrimination based on their sexual identity.

Discrimination is the antithesis to tolerance and the polar opposite of equality. There is no point at which discrimination because of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, physical and/or mental disability is justifiable in a country founded on the principle of "justice for all". Discrimination on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation is no different. Any behavior that promotes one group of humans over another automatically devalues every other group and whether we agree with this ideology or not an individual level, it is still prejudicial and compromises the basic human rights of everyone. We, as a nation and as a state, have made great progress in the area of human rights, and while we still have much work to do regarding the establishment of true equality, our progress has revealed one poignant truth... we are all in this together!

I would like to take a moment to relate the story of a close friend. This friend interviewed for and received a job offer by a small, locally owned business in Bozeman. She accepted this job and during the first 3 months of her employment she received much praise for her work ethic and dependability. In fact, her employer often admitted that he wished he had 10 employees just like her. And then he heard a rumor that she was a lesbian. At no point did he question her about her sexual orientation/identification before or after this rumor surfaced, but instead simply took her aside and explained that he felt uncomfortable with her being an employee of his. "Your attitude and lifestyle are not conducive to this environment", he said. She was fired immediately. She wasn't fired due to poor on the job performance, chronic tardiness or missed time. She had an exemplary, albeit brief, work history with this employer and was fired for nothing more or less than a simple rumor regarding her sexual orientation.

Discrimination against someone due to their sexual identity or sexual orientation is perhaps not as obvious as other forms of discrimination as you cannot determine one's sexual orientation/gender identity by their skin color, age or other physical and mental attributes. It is therefore much more insidious. When someone can be terminated from employment, passed over for a well-deserved promotion, evicted from their home, turned down for a home loan, etc. on the basis of race, sex, gender identity, color, national origin, religion, physical and/or mental disability, age or, as we have in the Montana Human Rights Act, Marital status, then it is discrimination.

Discrimination is based on prejudice, and a dictionary definition of prejudice is, "injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights". So, I urge you to please vote on behalf of your constituents and support HB 252 in order to acknowledge the amazing advances we've already made toward a just and equal society, as well as to support the ongoing efforts necessary to make "justice for all" a reality for all and not just for a select majority.

Thank you.

Kryssa M. Bowman

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February 15, 2009

House Judiciary Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

In reference to House Bill 252, sponsored by Rep. Margaret Campbell (District 31), I would like to address the issues surrounding the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in human rights and government practices.

This bill effectively affords Montanans the promise of the federally stalemated Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), with far more Montanan protections of individual liberties extending beyond employment. HB 252 is a comprehensive rewrite of the state's non-discrimination policies, making sure that sexual orientation and gender identity are a protected class in employment, housing, financial, and other venues that have the potential for discrimination, yet by law, can and should not.

As a gay man living in Montana, I dread the day when one of my friends loses their job due to their sexuality, or their former sex. Yet I know this state and this nation are built on the principles of equal rights for all, and that I have the hope that justice will eventually prevail. However, until bills such as HB 252 are passed, my hope is only a dream, and my sense of dread is still a tangible, living nightmare.

Please show your constituents and all Montanans the respect for their individual freedom by supporting House Bill 252.

Yours,

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February 15, 2009

House Judiciary Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

In reference to House Bill 252, sponsored by Rep. Margaret Campbell (District 31), I would like to address the issues surrounding the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in human rights and government practices.

I feel that the passage of this bill is vital to the fundamental American belief that all are equal and deserve justice. Montana is one of many states that must take a stand and ensure that discrimination is not tolerated. Members of the LGBT community are just as much a part of this nation as any other social group and deserve to be treated fairly.

As a lesbian student in chemical engineering it infuriates me that some believe my sexual orientation could in any way affect my job performance. My ability work with others, solve problems, and be productive is independent of my personal life. To be fired for who I love is a form of bigotry that is abominable and unethical. While some claim sexual orientation is a moral issue, this should be irrelevant in the legislation process. What one chooses to believe is fine, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of other. To legislate personal morals takes out the role of reason and respect for others' individual rights. Sexual identity and homosexuality do no harm to anyone (either the direct individuals or the rest of society).

Please encourage your fellow representatives to follow your lead in promoting equality for all by voting in support of HB 252.

Thank you very much,

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February 15, 2009

House Judiciary Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

In reference to House Bill 252, sponsored by Rep. Margaret Campbell (District 31), I would like to address the issues surrounding the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in human rights and government practices.

I am a fifth generation native of Montana, I was born and raised in this beautiful state, educated in one of our wonderful rural public schools and I am a proud alumna of Montana State University.... I also happen to be a trans-woman.

A tragic fact about my situation with regard to current Montana law is that, even though I am highly qualified for the work I do, and even though I have through my effort and ideas brought, perhaps, millions of dollars to the company I have worked for nearly 20 years, I could at any moment and without recourse be eliminated from my job simply because I am trans-gendered. Further, if that should occur, I would find myself facing a hostile job market in which I could be denied a chance at any job I should happen to apply simply because I am part of the minority GBLT community.

The fact that I am not one of the fortunate members of the majority hetero- and gender-normative population will very likely one day mean that if I want a job at all, I will have to take my talent and my Montana education and leave my lifelong home along with my friends and family as I exit the state to find a more positive job climate. My being a trans-gendered individual who has chosen the path of realization of self does not in any way affect my ability to perform any job that I could perform while I was a closeted self-loathing pretender. In fact, being finally self-accepting and actually happy and well-adjusted only means I can be a more productive worker than previous.

So many in the liberal and conservative camps agree that they want people working and to reduce crime and promote healthy living. Well, allowing the continuance of a job market that practices discrimination against a minority, is not only a failure to provide equal protection under the law, it also can have the unfortunate consequence of, at best, adding to the welfare roles and, at worst, forcing people who might otherwise be productive contributing members of society into crime and prostitution.

There are many more highly educated, intelligent and extremely talented gay and gender variant people in the state currently than many might imagine. They are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and friends; they have so much to offer, yet they are

finding themselves having to leave the state simply because the state currently sanctions intolerance and prejudice by their inaction in regard to making antidiscrimination and true equal opportunity law. So many valuable citizens have already left, please give HB 252 your honest consideration to prevent further injustice.

Sincerely,

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